

Moonlight Schools in the Mountains

A UNITED STATES without a single adult who cannot read or write is the dream absorbing the life of Mrs. Cora Wilson Stewart, founder of the Moonlight Schools of Kentucky. She has been carrying her dream before Congressional committees recently to get the Smith-Towner bill creating a Department of Education passed. Officially Mrs. Stewart is chairman of the Illiteracy Commission of Kentucky, the first board of its kind in this country. She is also chairman of the illiteracy committee of the National Educational Association. But the title she likes to claim first of all is that of a mountaineer.

Short Order Lessons

Mrs. Stewart told of the work of the commission during the war, when teachers were sent to meet the trains of soldiers who might even be in town for one day only. A young lad who had just married and was on his way to camp happened to learn of the opportunity to have a teacher for the fundamentals of reading and writing when he reached a certain station. He had what the teachers call "the immediacy of an incentive," for he wanted more than anything else just then to be able to write back to his bride. He went to the teacher at 10 o'clock that morning, and by diligent application and stopping

only for luncheon and supper by 10 o'clock that night he was able to pen a four-line message to his wife. His train left the next day, but the Illiteracy Commission rejoiced that it had laid the foundation of the work to be done later at the cantonment by Uncle Sam in re-



*Cora Wilson Stewart
Founder of the Kentucky Moonlight Schools, is backing the
Smith-Towner education bill*

moving illiteracy still further from the bridegroom.

The government sent over about fifty thousand of the primers written by Mrs. Stewart for the Ken-

tucky illiterates to the drafted men abroad. These books were also widely used in the cantonments here.

"The campaign to stamp out illiteracy is growing every year," said Mrs. Stewart during her visit to Washington. "States of the South are appropriating money to reclaim those men and women who have been lost to it because of inability to read or write. New Mexico opened its campaign several years ago. It has recently reported that 15,000 adults have been taught to read and write since their moonlight schools opened. North Carolina, Oklahoma and Alabama have taken up the crusade. Kentucky has set aside \$75,000 for the work.

Educating Native Americans

"This work must not be confused with Americanization. We work entirely with native-born Americans. This comes about because there is practically no foreign-born element in the South compared with the great urban populations of the East.

"There have been remarkable changes from illiteracy to at least partial literacy. There have been cases of our moonlight school pupils advancing to the fifth grade. There was one instance of such a pupil going through normal school and afterward becoming a teacher. I

recall one man who applied for a position as foreman of the section gang with which he was employed. He was refused because he could not read or write. He heard of a moonlight school being open in the county. Within three weeks that man made his application in writing to the railroad company and was given the position. The explanation of this rapid acquiring of the ability to read and write to some degree is that adults have so much more desire to learn than have children. These illiterates have known what it is to be without that knowledge, and they are so eager to get away from just making their marks."

Moonlight schools correspond to the evening schools of the cities, but are conducted for illiterates solely, and were so called because, there being no lights on rural roads, the classes were first held at the time when the moon would light the way to school. They last for six weeks and the name "moonlight" is of more advertising and campaign value than anything else, as the adults, once they are tempted to enter the schoolroom, usually remain for the full term. Mrs. Stewart started them in Kentucky through her great interest in the mountain-er illiterate.

The Southern states are using these schools more and more to make up for the education their grown-ups missed when they were children. They differ from the city night schools also in their campaign for students. The schools operate under the regular authorities wherever they are in force.

L. L. R.

